

IN THE CLAIMS

*The status of the claims as presently amended is as follows:*

1. (*Currently Amended*) A needle bar drive apparatus for a sewing machine comprising:

a dedicated drive source for driving a needle bar of the sewing machine ~~to move up and down~~; and

control means for, when the needle bar is driven for performing a sewing operation ~~is to be performed~~, controlling said drive source to cause the needle bar to move up and down within a predetermined stroke range, ~~but and~~, when no sewing operation is to be performed, controlling said drive source to cause the needle bar to retreat to a predetermined evacuation position set above a top dead center ~~within of~~ the predetermined stroke range.

2. (*Currently Amended*) A needle bar drive apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said control means ~~is also capable of varying~~ controls the drive source to vary a timewise pattern of upward and downward movement of the needle bar within the predetermined stroke range.

3. (*Currently Amended*) A needle bar drive apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the stroke range is variable, in accordance with a thickness of an object for sewing, by variably setting a position of the top dead center ~~within of~~ the predetermined stroke range.

4. (*Currently Amended*) A needle bar drive apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said drive source ~~is comprises~~ comprises a rotary motor ~~that drives for driving~~ the needle bar ~~to move up and down via and~~ a movement conversion mechanism for converting rotary movement of said drive source into linear reciprocating movement.

5. (*Currently Amended*) A needle bar drive apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the sewing machine includes a plurality of sewing heads, and said drive source is provided for each of the sewing heads.